

July 3, 2005  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“The Burden Bearing Christ”  
Matt 11:20-30 NLT

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God. 21 "What horrors await you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have sat in deep repentance long ago, clothed in sackcloth and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. 22 I assure you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on the judgment day than you! 23 And you people of Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in Sodom, it would still be here today. 24 I assure you, Sodom will be better off on the judgment day than you."

25 Then Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. 26 Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

27 "My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

Everyone know what a yoke is? Not the yellow part of an egg; not a funny story with a punch line. A yoke is a wooden frame with loops at either end, fitted around the necks of a pair of oxen, etc., for harnessing them together. It binds, connects or unites the two together to work for a common purpose.

There is a wonderful legend concerning the quiet years of Jesus, the years prior to his visible ministry. The legend claims that Jesus the carpenter was one of the master yoke-makers in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus son of Joseph.

When customers arrived with their team of oxen Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team, their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and he would carefully place the newly made yoke over the shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting them perfectly to this particular team of oxen.

That's the yoke Jesus invites us to take. Do not be misled by the word "easy," used in other translations of our text, for its root word in Greek speaks directly of the tailor-made yokes: they were "well-fitting." The yoke Jesus invites us to take, the yoke that brings rest to weary souls, is one that is made exactly to our lives and hearts. The yoke he invites us to wear fits us well, does not rub us nor cause us to develop sore spirits and is designed for two. His yokes were always designed for two. And our yoke-partner is none other than Christ himself.

Running throughout all scripture from the beginning to the end is the theme that ours is a burden bearing Christ. He is not just a Lord whom we burden, and we do, but a Lord who actually solicits our burdens. Peter writes (1 Peter 5:7 NKJV) "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." I want to think with you this morning concerning that thought. If we are to be effective we must first be free from our burdens. And, it is Christ who frees us. Frees us from...

### 1. The burden of sin

In Matt 11:20-21 NLT, we read, "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities where he had done most of his miracles, because they hadn't turned from their sins and turned to God." Jesus wants us to turn from our sins and turn to God that we might live a holy life, a life where God is the center of all we do. Holiness describes this completely restored relationship with God.

Sin is a burden. It crushes, weighs down with guilt and shame. Sin becomes addictive and destructive. Sin separates us from God, it puts us in an estranged relationship with God. That's what sin is – not a thing to be removed, rather an absence of a relationship with God. The greatest sin is to reject Jesus. For only Jesus can forgive our sin in order to establish and maintain a relationship with God. (John 14:6 NLT) Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

Did you notice in our text that Jesus doesn't say to sinners, "Get away from me" but "Come to Me." He wants that burden of sin to be lifted off your shoulders and it will be as you come to the cross of Christ. Jesus forgives our sin healing our relationship with God that we may enter into communion with Him. You know God exists when are you going to give Him your life?

### 2. The burden of self-righteousness.

Matt 11:25-26 NLT Then Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise and clever, and for revealing it to the childlike. 26 Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

Self-righteousness is being filled with or showing a conviction of being morally superior or more righteous than others. This is a burden. It is a burden because you have to be at work all the time pretending your better than you are; at work looking for the bad in others. You can't help others because you're too busy condemning them or gossiping about them. Yet, I suppose it is easier work to look at the bad in others than to look at your own heart and have to face your own needs. Self-righteousness is love gone astray.

It's love locked up into a false center, the self ...a distortion of love. It's when we think only of ourselves instead of others and how God wants us to love others. Self-righteous people have a problem with pride. They think they are better than others. Norman Vincent Peale wrote: "Humble people don't think less of themselves . . . they just think about themselves less." Not self-righteous people, they only care about themselves.

Thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought doesn't make us a joyful people...selfishness never does. Self-righteousness makes us bitter instead of better.

The theologian Leonard Sweet underwent what he describes as a "deconversion" when he was nineteen. He writes,

"What ignited my deconversion was the church's funereal spirit, its fussy, buttoned-upness. Christians' stay-at-home-and-pickle-in-their-own-juices personalities, their vinegary countenances, drained me emotionally, incapacitated me intellectually, and shut me down spiritually. The best I could say was this: by and large, Christians were kind people in a bad mood."

Jesus wants to lift that burden. To do that we must be humbled.

(Luke 18:9-14 NLT) Then Jesus told this story to some who had great self-confidence and scorned everyone else: *[from NIV "who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else"]*<sup>10</sup> "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a dishonest tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The proud Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

<sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."

The point here is that we can't trade good deeds for God's grace. God's grace cannot be found without humility. Jesus wants to lift the burden of self-righteousness by humbling us that we may see our need for His grace. The secret in finding rest for your soul is knowing that you are filled with His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. When our hearts are full of God's love we delight to do His will. "Love makes all burdens light."

3. Our own burdens. So we can bear the burden of others.

In Matt 11:28 Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Who are invited? All, all who are weary and burdened. All who are suffering physically, emotionally or spiritually. To all who are weighed down and weary Jesus says, "Come to Me ...and I will rest you with my presence." To take His yoke is to submit fully to His authority. To the rabbis, taking up one's yoke meant "going to school." So Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you." He says, "I am humble and gentle and you will find rest for your souls."

That is where there is true rest, learning from Jesus to be humble and gentle. He further says: "For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

We commonly think of a yoke as I described earlier: a wooden frame with loops at either end, fitted around the necks of a pair of oxen, etc. But in Biblical time and today also a yoke is also the name of a frame that fits over the shoulders of one person for carrying weights on each end. Usually pails hung from each end of the yoke. When I was in Korea people did not have sewers, they had out houses. Men would come periodically to empty the out houses with buckets on *long* ropes. They wore a "yoke" that fit around their shoulders with *long* arms that went out and they could hold those heavy buckets as they hung on each side of that yoke, now that I think of it, the long arms keeping those buckets at a long distance may have had another purpose as well. But, with the help of a yoke they could carry the buckets a long distance, and the Koreans did...by foot – they would not be able to do that without the yoke. In Biblical times also, often people had to carry loads impossible for a human being to carry, but when he was give a yoke, the burden became much easier. Jesus does not say you will never have burdens, but that He will give us the means to carrying them so that they are not too much for us. Or, again as He put it, "For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light."

Are you trusting Jesus? Are you praying instead of being anxious? Are you giving your burdens to Jesus so that you are free to bear the burdens of others? God calls us to bear the burdens of others. Gal 6:2 (NIV) "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." But we can't do that if we are not free from the burden of sin, self-righteousness or if we are weary from burdens we are carrying ourselves instead of bringing them to our Father in heaven.

I remember an old story about a little boy who was out helping dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain area of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while Dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, "I can't do it." Dad asked, "Did you use all of your strength?" The little boy looked hurt and said, "Yes, sir. I used every ounce of strength I have." The father smiled and said, "No you didn't. You didn't ask me to help." The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt.

One of the great Biblical truths seems impossible. Freedom comes through being yoked...if you are yoked with Christ.